From Suffering to Shangri-La: Maria Irene Fornes's Musings on the Future in *Enter THE NIGHT*

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A premature production of the Cuban-born American dramatist Maria Irene Fornes's *Terra Incognita* (1992) staged a scene where, in a brief moment of revelation, a character disclosed the reason of his uneasiness to a total stranger. He had AIDS.[1] That production was in 1992, a year after the wide-reaching announcement of Freddie Mercury's death from AIDS-related pneumonia and five years after the AIDS-related death of Charles Ludlam, who was a striking personality in the rather small Off-Off Broadway circle and apparently known to Fornes.[2] In 1992, *Terra Incognita* was still a work-in-progress. When Fornes later revised the play, she left out the character's statement about the syndrome; neither of the two published texts of the play (1993 and 2003) mention it. While she was writing *Terra Incognita*, though, Fornes was also commissioned by Theater Zero to write another play in which AIDS is a significant presence. This play was to become *Enter THE NIGHT*, which would premiere at New City Theater in Seattle in 1993, followed by another production the next year at Dallas Theater Center.[3]

As its title would suggest, *Enter THE NIGHT* implies a mode of gathering darkness, which is heightened by the play's unspecified temporality and empty-warehouse setting. THE NIGHT itself is an essential dramatic element, an invisible allegorical character whose presence is overwhelmingly felt throughout. It serves as a prelude to what the play has to offer atmospherically and, therefore, immediately predetermines the dramatic present of the play. However, it would be delusive to take this initial interpretation for granted, as Fornes allows for neither prejudgment nor easy conclusions in her plays. My discussion of *Enter THE NIGHT* will, accordingly, focus on Fornes's move from the dark tone established by the play's title and its stark emphasis on illness, specifically AIDS, to a space where physical failures, disabilities,

and social attitudes towards illness dissolve into a space of polytopianism. Una Chaudhuri defines polytopianism as "placelessness not as the absence or erasure of place but as the combination and layering, one on top of another, of many different places, many distinct orders of spatiality" (138). Ultimately hinting at an optimistic vision of the future, this alternative spatiality is illustrated in the play mainly by Buddhist philosophy, dreaming, and Christian redemption, among other formal and narrative devices.

In Fornes's drama, Bonnie Marranca observes, "the individual body is never disconnected from the world but is a measure of its social biology" (57). Susan Sontag contextualises the relation between what Marranca calls the individual body and social biology when she states that "if it is plausible to compare the polis to an organism, then it is plausible to compare civil disorder to an illness" (*Illness* 77). The inductive link that extends from the individual body to comment on a macro-system informs the play, which dramatizes the extent of corrupt social biology in the form of physical, mental, and emotional suffering as experienced and confronted by a triangle of friends —Tressa, Paula and Jack—as they reunite in Tressa's warehouse. In less than a day's time, these three characters connect with one another by talking of past experiences and discussing subjects as varied as love, art, beauty, and, most strikingly, illness. Working as a nurse, Tressa goes through a genuine sense of loss when her patients die. After work, she takes care of her friend Paula, who has a heart condition. Paula is married with children and lives in the countryside. In spite of her physical frailty, she has an almost obsessive desire to farm, which is the means through which she defines her identity: "[I]f the person I am dies, then, I die—If taking care of what I love kills me, then I want to die" (131). Then there is Jack, who is plagued both by a strong belief that he has HIV and by a sense of guilt resulting from his boyfriend's death of AIDS-related illness. But as he keeps testing negative for the virus, his illness seems to be psychosomatic, as opposed to Paula's bodily disorder. *Enter THE NIGHT* problematizes how this kind of disintegrated corporeality and mentality, which is a very private, visibly degrading and socially stigmatizing form of suffering, relates to the outside world.

In *Enter THE NIGHT*, the societal organism links to the individual organism as posited in the previous paragraph and, on another level relates to the dramaturgy, the organism of the play. The play reflects such disorder structurally in the numerous metatheatrical, audio, and representational intrusions that resist the main flow of the narrative. Interspersed in the reunion of the three friends, which is divided into two acts, is a collection of intertextual refer-

ences ranging from folk songs to re-enactments of movie fragments, religious symbolism, and a reading of a play written by Jack. Sheila Rabillard notes that the Seattle premiere of *Enter THE NIGHT*, directed by Fornes, showed videotapes of the two films from which Fornes borrows—D. W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919) and Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937)—before the performance and during intermission (35). As suggested by Fornes's direction, the fragments from these films are integral to the play's message. *Lost Horizon* entails a vision of a new world, while *Broken Blossoms* points to a reading of frustration as desire. Tressa and Jack perform a scene from this movie, both in cross-gendered roles, a performance that demonstrates a connection between the present and the future when viewed on a wider scale.

As the play develops in a fairly realistic mode, these superimposed texts and performances provide surrealistic undertones, thereby pointing towards hope for levels of existence other than the one indicated by the suffering of the "individual body." The play achieves its representation of this alternative space mainly through these intertextual devices, which produce an alternate state of existence, such as dreaming, to those marked by darkness and illness. Dim lighting dominates the stage and supports the dark atmosphere, which is evocative of sleeping and dreaming. The play starts with the break of dawn, takes place for the most part during the night, and ends at 8:00 the next morning, with the lights slowly fading until the final black-out.

The action is set around a huge pit, which implies imminent danger. Among other, more obvious symbolic interpretations of the pit is its potential function as the subconscious, the deep, incalculable, and unstable state of being, quite similar to the metaphor of the bottom of a stone in *Fefu and her Friends* (1977), an earlier play by Fornes.[4] In addition to the play's dark atmosphere, such unclear associations provide an ambience that lays the basis for fusing dreams as well as other intertextual elements. *Enter THE NIGHT* received mixed reviews because of the ambiguity caused by oblique shifts between reality and dreams and between representation and re-enactments overlaid on the narrative (Berson D2; Feingold 83). However, this sense of elusiveness is precisely what Fornes facilitates in order to transgress the limits of time, space, and corporeality in her search for alternative ways of thinking about the future.

It is, in fact, Fornes's own experience with the ebb and flow between reality and dreams that informs the structure of the play. Fittingly, *Enter THE NIGHT* was originally titled *Dreams* and inspired by the records she had been keeping of her dreams. These records consisted mainly of monologues, which

were expanded into dialogues between the characters. The play's origin in monologues can be observed throughout insofar as many of the speeches sound trance-like, progressing in a manner that neither addresses an onstage character nor the audience. In addition to this monologic technique, interaction between characters, particularly in critical moments, is essentially maintained through gestures and movement, not through dialogical conversation.

When Fornes's own dreaming transfers into the play, it represents another contrasting pole to the pain-ridden world of Tressa, Jack, and Paula. Actual temporality as we perceive it in the play is undermined by dreams, which communicate a sense of the future. For instance, at the beginning of the play, before Jack arrives, Paula lies on the upper bench on the stage. To the uninitiated audience, this could either mean that she is sleeping or that she is sick. As soon as Tressa enters, she starts reading aloud from her patient-check notes, at once alerting the audience members to the issue of Paula's illness, and after a short while, they learn that Paula is both sick and sleeping. When Paula is awoken after Tressa turns on the light, she mentions a short Latino man who came into Tressa's warehouse to look for a tool. The man, who is apparently called José Luis, had a big moustache, a gold tooth and a large nose. Tressa thinks Paula was dreaming. Paula cannot determine if it was real or a dream, but concludes in the end that it was a dream, as it sounds too uncanny. The drawer of the carpenter's cabinet that this strange man supposedly looked into has been left open. Paula also tells Tressa that José Luis asked her if she wanted to wrap her legs around him, a question to which she responded positively. Shortly afterwards, Jack comes in wearing a false moustache and nose and a chocolate wrapper on his tooth. On being questioned about this disguise, Jack responds mockingly, making it clear that he was not the man Paula claims to have met. He then makes a very brief reference to characters named José Luis and Conchita in the 1992 Bigas Luna film *Jamón Jamón*,[5] leaving the audience with a sense of suspense and uncertainty from the very beginning of the play.

If Paula's story of this strange man is a dream, it is a prescient one. But how could a dream that is nothing but a fantastical reproduction of the unconscious portray a futuristic scene? With regard to this query, Carl Jung asserts:

> Just as memories that have long since fallen below the threshold are still accessible to the unconscious, so also are certain very fine subliminal combinations that point forward, and these are of the greatest significance for the future events insofar as the latter are conditioned by our psychology. [. . .] It happens easily enough in

> the unconscious, and it seems as if from time to time, under certain conditions, important fragments of this work come to light, at least in dreams, thus accounting for the prophetic significance of dreams long claimed by superstition. Dreams are very often anticipations of future alterations of consciousness. (51)

Considered in the light of Jung's observation, Paula's dream signifies a consciously unattainable level where the future comes into existence and interferes with the present. The futuristic anticipation, in this case, is a happy one, as Paula is delighted to hear from Tressa that Jack will be arriving shortly. Fornes's exploration of dreams and the unconscious in *Enter THE NIGHT* is a temporal investigation that, by moving in time, disrupts linearity and dislocates the present and the sense of actuality connected with it. Through this temporal play, Fornes exhibits that the future glimpsed through dreaming, though only for the interim, frees Paula from the sorrow of her sickness and brings evidence of joy to her. In this respect, the dreaming space temporarily frees Paula from her suffering, revealing another level of existence, another possibility.

A curious link becomes obvious when Fornes's view on creativity and dreaming is taken into consideration. Recalling Freud's comparison in his 1908 essay "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," Fornes asserts this link more than once: "Your stories are from memories, but can turn into fantasy. They are from the same part of you that dreams" (qtd. in Trenning).[6] Story-telling and dreaming share a source of creativity. They both blossom into a fantasy reproduction in what Freud terms "the three moments of time which our ideation involves" (147). More specifically:

> Mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience [. . .] in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish. (147)

Freud's conceptualization of the mechanism of dreams and creativity emphasizes an unsatisfying situation in the present, which turns into a wish and switches the mind to a past moment through retrospection so as to construct a similar picture directed towards the future through fantasy. Paula's dream creation seems to be rooted in a memory, probably of José Luis in *Jamón Jamón*, who reappears as a Hispanic stranger[7] coming into Tressa's warehouse in search of a tool that is both *fixing* and phallic. In the film, José Luis cannot

marry the girl he loves; likewise, the stranger unexpectedly tells Paula in her dream that "he couldn't possibly marry me" (126). Paula's dream encounter, thus, resorts to a memory of a film, and by rendering her bodily conditions fit for a sexual encounter, this dream fulfils (or fixes) a sexual wish without the responsibility and commitment that marriage entails. Fornes therefore establishes very early on in *Enter THE NIGHT* that dreaming is a form of creativity that can reveal latent possibilities.

In addition to the concealed alternative spaces exemplified by dreaming, the play highlights another level of existence and connection: strong friendship as displayed between Tressa, Jack, and Paula. *Enter THE NIGHT* is not driven by the bare line of plot in which three old friends are reunited for a day. Rather, it is informed by the characters' individual sufferings or traumas and the comfort gained through their sense of familiarity with one another and a genuine attentiveness. Simple acts like preparing coffee for one another, Jack changing the light bulb in the bathroom for Paula, and Tressa and Paula attentively reading and joyfully celebrating Jack's play maintain the overarching tone of friendship. Tressa remains, throughout the play, the key figure in promoting this kind of contact between the characters. Her name fittingly evokes Catholic symbolism in the form of St. Teresa of Avila, a 16th century nun and the patron saint of AIDS patients, suffering, and illness. This association seems clear when Paula avows her belief in Tressa's healing capacity, saying, "I always think when I'm about to die I'll call your name and you'll run to my side and save me. You'll just put your hand on my forehand and I'll get well" (129). Besides taking care of Paula, Tressa also struggles throughout the play to convince Jack to accept the fact that he is HIV negative and that it was not Jack who passed the virus on to his former boyfriend, Joey. Jack, denounced by society if not plagued by the virus, is the most severely suffering character at the heart of the play. Although, in a Christ-like manner, he never gives up his victim position, he finds peace and affection with Tressa and Paula. Ingrained as the core of communication between Tressa, Jack, and Paula, friendship offers a strong connection that signifies an overlying hopefulness and a way to resist predominant systems of censure.

The strong bonding between Tressa, Jack, and Paula is also underlined by the way dialogue works in the play. Scattered in between distinctively short lines of speech, which illustrate that the characters do not need to explain at length their daily activities, are quite long, almost confessional speeches about their innermost feelings and long-forgotten memories. For instance, Jack

relates to Tressa and Paula the most intimate feelings he went through in the aftermath of Joey's death in a long, repetitive speech. Jack's comments about Joey's family also highlight the problem of the lack of gay partnership rights:

> *They didn't want me to go to the funeral. They took all his things [. . .] I didn't want any of it. I just wanted the fur coat that used to be mine [. . .] He loved the way it felt on his body. And that's why I wanted it. Because having that coat would make me feel that I still had him. They thought I wanted it because it was valuable. (148-49)*

Contrasting with Jack's poignancy and his emotional investment in the coat is the rigidly materialist and discriminatory approach of Joey's family. In trying to keep their son's belongings away from Jack and not recognizing his rights of partnership, Joey's parents deny the legitimacy of homosexuality, epitomizing a society that, by means of disregard, alienates what it deems different and intolerable.

Befriending and loving a person without judging them on restrictive terms of social classification is offered as the principal means of resistance to the prejudice against differences in *Enter THE NIGHT*. Tressa, Jack, and Paula all have different sexual orientations and thereby exemplify diverse sexual subjects: Jack is homosexual, Paula is heterosexual, and Tressa is androgynous; she unites the characteristics of both sexes, though her sexual desire is directed solely toward Jack. However, they accept one another for their personal value rather than blindly submitting to the social definitions of sex and gender. In fact, Tressa's persevering love for Jack, who obviously cannot return the kind of love she feels for him, proves that love is a force that does not respect restrictions as such. The affectionate relationship between all three of the friends constructs a space that provides a transcendental mode of existence through which the stark realities of their lives are counteracted.

Their discussion of beauty, for instance, brings into question normative values pertaining to judgmental opinions that may have a traumatizing effect. Talking about her parents, Tressa illuminates the narrow definitions of beauty:

> My father loved my mother because she was beautiful. He too loved people for their beauty. He loved my brother because he was beautiful and he liked to paint him. He didn't like me because I wasn't beautiful. (157)

Jack and Paula readily object to Tressa's claim that she is not beautiful. They do not do so as a false reassurance of her beauty, but because they genuinely believe that she is beautiful. Jack and Paula's perception of beauty resists and questions social norms rather than blindly accepting them. Their approach to

beauty is, therefore, put forward as a way of having a healthier, less prescriptive society in the future.

Tressa, as I suggested earlier, is a saintly figure in the play. However, her role as a savior does not exempt her from pain. Besides dealing with the emotional suffering passed onto her by her patients and friends, Tressa also has trouble with her body. She feels comfortable only when she dresses up as a man, wearing a traditional Chinese dress and yellowish-white cream on her face. Cross-dressing in her case could be an effort to mask herself, thus blurring or blocking her body from the excruciating world of the play. After talking to Paula about a patient of hers who does not want to fight for his life anymore, Tressa gets "despondent" (130) and starts to put on her Chinese costume in order to feel comfortable. Like any other cross-dressing, Tressa's is also an incentive for the audience to question race and gender labels attached to the body. Cross-dressing in theatre "carries with it the possibility for exposing that liminal moment, that threshold of questioning, that slippery sense of a mutable self" (Ferris 9). This sort of invitation to question the grounds of biological determinism becomes all the more striking when Tressa and Jack start the action of the second act by performing a scene from D. W. Griffith's silent movie *Broken Blossoms.* For this brief scene, Tressa cross-dresses as Huang, a Chinese scholar who tries to save an American girl from the hands of her abusive father. Jack plays the girl, Lillian. Their performance serves as a "subversive repetition" in which "the task is not whether to repeat but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (Butler 189). In this, the most intimate scene of the play, Jack and Tressa insert their own sexual identities, and by performing gender in their own ways, surmount its ontological definitions. The enactment of Griffith's silent film thus opens up the possibility for Tressa and Jack to perform in a space where they are accepted as they are.

Their performance ends in despair as Huang (Tressa) comes back to find Lillian (Jack) beaten to death by her father. At that point, Fornes's stage directions read: "He holds her in his arms as she dies. They stay motionless for a while" (162). This scene prefigures Tressa and Jack's Pietá position towards the end of the play. Jack's position as a Christ-like victim is thus confirmed through various iconographic references. Although victimization contributes to the tone of the play, more emphasis is placed on the comfort and familiarity with which Tressa and Jack relate to each other. This silent performance,

like other intertextual references in the play, presents an alternative medium, a subtext resisting *Enter THE NIGHT*'s focal world of suffering.

Tressa's cross-dressing defies compulsory heterosexuality to express her desire for Jack, who is apparently gay, but who has broken the (homo)sexual code by having sex with Tressa in the past. *Enter THE NIGHT* suggests that fear and pain could also be surmounted by a code-breaking sort of "trans-gression" which is "a therapeutic interrogation of social codes, a process of constant critique which prevents any system becoming totalitarian" (Smith 131) in Julia Kristeva's terms. "We must," writes Anne-Marie Smith, "relate powers of transgression to the potency of the libidinal drive to transgress, to revolt against and be revolted with the symbolic code, the law, oedipal identity and taboo" (131). In the case of Tressa and Jack, it is by cross-dressing and experiencing cross-gender roles through *Broken Blossoms* that they relate to each other and overcome their fears. As Tressa explains:

> I noticed that if I wore a dress he'd be nervous. If I wore pants he was relaxed. One day I dressed like this. And I felt very calm. And he came close to me and he said, "Wang." And I said, "Yes." He was beautiful and I felt beautiful and it was beautiful just the way we were with each other, at peace with each other. (166)

Theirs is an attempt to break away from the social configurations of sex and race. By eradicating the visual registers of socially implemented gender role schemes, Jack and Tressa oppose their ready-made places in the world of sign systems. Depending solely on these bodies of divergent referents, they find access to a different level of love and friendship, performing in a peaceful union.

Moreover, aesthetic representation of gender and sex through cross-dressing frames the body as a political site and problematizes issues of subjectivity. In Lacanian terms, subjectivity develops after a child experiences the mirror stage, a process through which the child is exposed to the "name of the father." While moving from the imaginary stage to the symbolic, every child experiences a psychic disruption that eventually results in the child's introduction to linguistic discourse.[8] From this point of view, Tressa and Jack's cross-dressing could be a mode of representation that excludes them from the symbolic order, where numerous prohibitions designed to uphold the status quo prevail. In the case of Tressa and Jack, these prohibitions are set against their sexual identities. However, they seek to annul them by taking on divergent sexual markers. Their silent performance therefore opens up the possibility of operating outside of a language system that imposes differences.

Their enactment also encodes a hint of camp sensibility in terms of its intrinsic reversal, insofar as camp "is the love of the exaggerated, the 'off,' of things-being-what-they-are-not" (Sontag, "Notes" 279). Being in this "off" stage indicates a sense of pathos reconciled through performance, a state through which one can transcend boundaries. According to Sontag's definition of camp taste, "the most refined form of sexual attractiveness [. . .] consists in going against the grain of one's sex. What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine" (279). By role shifting and seeing each other through the other's eyes, Jack and Tressa establish a more refined form of sexual connection and formulate identities exempt from the various kinds of pressure the self imposes.

Fornes's stance against social prejudices and imposed differences is also evident in the stage design of *Enter THE NIGHT*. The stage is populated by plain furniture and, as mentioned before, there is a huge pit in the center. The setting provides a territory analogous to the bodies of the three characters, implying that the warehouse—practically a storage place—is a manifestation of both the body and the mind. The pit in the middle of the stage is "as large as the space permits" (123). In other words, an external intrusion caves into an inward collapse. Psychoanalytically, this womb-like image could be read as an infant's wish to be close to its mother when faced with the name or the law of the father which finds its symbolic expression in the phallus. The pre-mirror stage defines a condition wherein the child assumes that it is still a part of its mother. In this respect, the pit on the stage may signify a return to a preliminary stage where the child's ego is not yet formed and where differences, which seem to inflict suffering in the world of *Enter THE NIGHT*, are therefore abolished.

Another attempt at violating illness and suffering is realized through Fornes's exploitation of other audiovisual media, such as film fragments, country songs, and the inclusion of a news item about a Chinese scholar. These found materials either support or contradict the argument and sentiment of any given moment in the play. As soon as the play starts, Billie Holiday's "Don't Explain" accompanies Tressa's opening speech. Together with the lyrics and the rhythm of the song, Tressa's monologue sets a sense of contamination as an integral aspect of the play from its very start. She reads: "6 P.M. Patient in bed. Intermittent cough. Fogger in use. Skin very dry. Lotion applied to extremities. 8.30 Patient raising green phlegm periodically. Fluids not accepted" (124). The stark medical rhetoric of illness and,

by further implication, death, is contrasted with song lyrics that express a fear of loss and a longing for permanence: "Hush now, don't explain/Just say you'll remain." The song lines imply a positive expectation, suggesting that human relations must be defined by love and forgiveness. The song thus validates the existence of a kind of love tolerant of all failures or mistakes and contributes to the formation of an alternative space that rules out sickness and its dull rhetoric of labeling the human body in strictly scientific terms.

Besides this song, country songs are frequently heard throughout Tressa and Paula's reading of Jack's naïve-sounding play about a couple who negotiate their different backgrounds—one is from the city and the other a rural area—through love and care. The dialogue in the first act of this metatheatrical piece simply involves a discussion of the reasons why people do not keep cows in cities. By asking one another questions, the main characters, Eric and Wilma, reconcile their differences and express their satisfaction and love for each other by the end of the second act. Here, it is again through a human connection and through the world the couple creates for themselves that they overcome their differences and reach an ideal balance.

The importance of meaningful human connection is also underlined in the play by illustrating the link between desire and frustration. As soon as Tressa and Jack's performance of scenes from *Broken Blossoms* is over, Paula starts abruptly to relate a childhood memory of her first sexual encounter with her cousin. She describes the dynamics of their sexual exploration in terms of frustration and desire:

> I learned to come with him. But I didn't come each time. And I got very upset when I didn't. He said he didn't mind. He said he liked it when I came and he liked it when I didn't. I said, "Well, I don't," and he said that he liked to see me desperate and frustrated. [. . .] And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because then I know you want something from me." He saw my frustration as desire. Which it was. (162)

The feeling of frustration implies a sense of expectancy by its very nature. Paula is also presently frustrated with her sickness, because it keeps her away from her obsession, farming. Paula's frustration also conceals a heightened interest in the future: a desire to farm again. Thus, frustration caused by suffering and illness threatens the characters' desires, but also marks the subsistence of their desires. Rabillard notes that "the dominant note of the drama is desire: the unappeased longing of these three friends to ease one another's pain, or perhaps even to conceive it fully" ("Review" 283). Desire for life, then, also means for Tressa, Paula, and Jack the ability to help and

relieve each other, underscoring the play's basic idea that friendship offers an alternative space from where it is possible to resist suffering.

The play represents positively constructed spaces against already existing spaces of suffering and illness. However, it also warns that the future may be informed by illness. Jack expresses this threat through theater's equivalence to life:

> So many people are ill. . .so many people. . .everyone is ill. One day every single person will be ill. . .old illnesses. . .new illnesses. . .old symptoms. . .new symptoms. . .old treatments. . .new treatments [. . .]. Everything in our minds will be illness, the ill, the dying. All art will be about illness. All plays will be about illness. And the ill. The characters will be defined by their illness. It is the characters' illness that will determine the plot. [. . .] The leading characters will have the illness most common among theatregoers. Since theatregoers prefer to have plays written about them. Plays will be funded by pharmaceutical laboratories. (158-59)

This is quite a disconcerting vision of life and theatre in the future, because the odds of such a vision seem fairly high as the increased interest in medical conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, dementia and PTSD in today's theatre signals a turn towards that direction. Jack's prognosis of a "theatre of illness" sounds almost like a manifesto; it is detailed in the descriptions of its appeal to the audience—an appeal which is based on a connection between the audience and the dramatic characters established through empathy with illness.

Jack's assumptions about the state of human life and theatre in the future are undoubtedly informed by the present dramatic and real-life conditions and, by extension, the past. Similarly, the play's discussions of AIDS draw on this virus's being "a chain of transmission, from the past" (Sontag, *Illness* 158). After Jack goes out "into the night" towards the end of the play and reveals that he is gang raped, his concern about contagion-carrying damnation from the past becomes more obvious. The stage gets dark. When the lights come back on, implying a passage of time, Jack's terrorized mental space is dramatized through a scene in which Jack stands on a railing with his hands tied to a post behind him and his chest blood stained, representing Christ. "Don't touch me. I'm contagious" (176), Jack says to Tressa and Paula, who try to convince him in vain that he does not have HIV. Here, Fornes emphasizes the internalization of social attitudes towards AIDS and homosexuality by implying the mental constructs of fear in Jack's self-lamentation. As Sontag notes, "the fear of AIDS imposes an act whose ideal is an experience of pure

presentness (and a creation of the future) a relation to the past to be ignored at one's peril" (*Illness* 158). Jack, in spite of testing negative for HIV, assumes the role of transmitter from a past that runs the risk of contaminating the future. However, what contaminates the future, it is implied, is the social reproach of illness and homosexuality.

Christian iconography exhibited through the image of stigmata and, after that, by Tressa's holding Jack on her lap in a Pietá position sustains Jack's association with Christ. The representation of Christian iconography in a way that encompasses (homo)sexual implications constructs a space that destabilizes established religious notions such as the beliefs that closely associate sexual pleasure and homosexuality with sin. The Christian imagery in the play produces a mode of spatiality through which totalitarianism in faith is encountered and discussed. The limits of religious toleration are forced to expand as unorthodox sexual inclinations are presented through traditional religious iconography. As a representational strategy, this is an incitement to reconsider established belief systems and to imagine other viewing possibilities that resist culturally or religiously instigated acceptance of value systems.

From a different angle, the Pietá position that appears twice in the play may be considered through its more familiar signification, namely, the Christian belief of resurrection, which, in Buddhism, corresponds to faith in rebirth. Both systems of belief offer salvation: the first through redemption and the second through nirvana. Through the use of normative symbolism, the play asserts a conviction in a new beginning or social improvement that entails the acceptance and eradication of differences. This faith in salvation is most remarkable towards the end of the play, when all three characters join in one by one to the High Lama's voice from Frank Capra's film *Lost Horizon*:

> [. . .] but I see, at a great distance, a new world stirring clumsily but in hopefulness, seeking its lost and legendary treasure. And they will all be here, my children, hidden behind the mountains in the valley of Shangri-la, preserved as by a miracle for a new Renaissance. . . (178)

Shangri-la is a utopian space where an ideal social order is achieved by means of moderation. At least, this is what James Hilton's novel, on which the film is based, would suggest in accordance with the teachings of Buddha. However, Fornes's focus seems to be more on the principle of nirvana, which is the idea of salvation from suffering brought on by *samsara*, or the endless cycle of rebirth in Buddhism. There are two categories of nirvana, one described as nirvana in life and the other as nirvana in death. The latter is of no avail in this discussion, whereas the former is, especially when considering that

"to attain nirvana [in life] is to get rid of all desire and all delusion. It is to get rid of selfishness and a sense of self [which is] a superimposed concept, a mere construction" (Gombrich 165). Towards the end of the play and as a sign of Tressa, Jack, and Paula's suffering, they are projected with a blazing fire on stage along with stormy Wagnerian music. "I believe you will live through the storm," says The High Lama's voice, joined by Paula (178). The political associations of the Wagnerian music with the idea of a tumultuous age and the expressed belief of its end disparage any fascist discourse that entails the marginalization of the "other." All three characters are caught up in the restrictive discourses and practices of life, but once they live through the storm, they will come out enlightened and all differences, it is suggested, will be diminished. The utopian Shangri-la seems to offer the ultimate representation of this idealized sense of aftermath in the play.

As the three characters' voices turn into one, the monological structure that formed the starting point of Fornes's play reaches its pinnacle, implying some sort of unison in what seems to be a search for a new future. The present voices of the play, those of Tressa, Jack, and Paula, meet the High Lama's voice, from history (and fiction), to comment on the future. In this case, as Deborah R. Geis points out, if we take the stage as a revelation of "perpetual present," then "monologue allows the playwright to dislocate, fragment, and otherwise transform this perpetual present into other temporal modes" (10). Indeed, a transcendental mode, both temporal and corporeal, is established by this monologic performance. The amalgamation of various identities with a past voice abolishes difference through the use of monologue, introducing a vision of a new future that is clearly founded on demolishing the dichotomy of the self and other. "You will welcome the stranger," says the High Lama's voice, accompanied by Paula and Tressa (178). At that point, the stranger, or the most estranged of all, Jack, joins in the speech, continuing: "[A]nd teach him the rule of age and wisdom, and one of these strangers, it may be, will succeed you when you are yourself very old" (178). The belief in continuity is underscored by the principles of "next buddhas" and *bodhisattas* (those who aspire to become a Buddha) and welcoming the "stranger" in Buddhism. Because there is no original sin marked upon the human being in Buddhist teachings, nor any discriminatory idea such as that of "the elect," enlightenment is open to everyone. Buddhism in *Enter THE NIGHT* manifests a hope for the future, which in this context involves a sense of unity made up of diversity.

After critical moments such as the end of the characters' ritualistic recital from *Lost Horizon*, the lights fade to black, giving the audience time for brief reflection and digestion of the state of emotion upheld by the scene. In the final scene, Jack takes a slightly foetal position and gives out a soft cry. It could be a cry of relief or a cry meant to imply the deep roots of his ongoing suffering. The end is left open for further contemplation in a typically Fornesian manner. *Enter THE NIGHT* does not offer a prescription to suffering and illness. It is rather optimistic in its dramatization of frustration countered by desire. If we are frustrated with the poor conditions of the present, we still have a claim to the future—a desire to live in better conditions. Moreover, Fornes's extensive references to other texts challenge the play's intact organism by permeating its structure and suggesting an alternative to the main text. The texts folded into the play point to side doors that open to other worlds where there might be ways to negotiate our fears, weaknesses, and, ultimately, suffering. If the material world is terrorized by pain and offers no space for the physically and emotionally estranged, then, as Fornes does in *Enter THE NIGHT*, we could try to explore alternative levels of expression and existence.

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Notes

[1] Leon Martell, an actor in the 1992 production of *Terra Incognita* at the Dionysia Playwrights Festival, writes briefly about this version of the play's finale in which the audience is informed that Rob has AIDS (Delgado and Svich 40).

[2] I am thankful to Stephen J. Bottoms for informing me that Fornes used to live in the building where The Ridiculous Theatrical Company, founded and led by Charles Ludlam until his death, was based.

[3] As in many of her plays, Fornes made some textual and spatial changes after the first production. Reviews of its 1993 production suggest, for instance, that there was a balcony scene reminiscent of the one in *Romeo and Juliet*; Paula spoke about Arabian horses; and there was a man called Richard, all elements that were apparently reworked later, as they do not appear in the final text. Additionally, the pit that occupies the middle stage in the final text and at the New York premiere of the play does not appear in the early production.

[4] Fornes articulates the feminist politics of *Fefu and her Friends* by using this metaphor which suggests that the damp, invisible underside of a stone is associated with the female psyche or the position of women in patriarchal society.

[5] In *Jamón Jamón*, José Luis is a young man from a wealthy family who wants to marry a girl of lower status. To prevent them from marrying, José Luis's mother, Conchita, hires an aspiring bullfighter to seduce the girl. The film revolves around scenes of Spanish machismo as demonstrated through ham (the central motif of the film), bullfighting, and various sexual references.

[6] Also see Fornes et al. 32 and Marrero 229 for Fornes' thoughts on the connection between dreaming and creativity.

[7] The film's José Luis has remarkable physical differences from the José Luis of Paula's dream, but in the world of dreams, forms are usually distorted, and human figures can assume archetypal characteristics, as could be the case with the macho-looking José Luis of the dream.

[8] For more information, see Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), pp.1-8.

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